

**T**HE MOST ESSENTIAL RESOURCE OF ANY BUSINESS IS ITS

WORKFORCE. Your bottom line depends on having qualified, dedicated and productive employees. Utah has one of the fastest job growth rates in the country, so employers find themselves competing for the most qualified workers. As you develop strategies for recruitment, motivation and retention of those workers, consider the potential impact of work/life support on those efforts.

A workforce needs study conducted in 1995 combined quantitative data from a survey of more than 600 businesses, and qualitative information from six focus groups held around the state. According to the study, Utah employers had trouble finding qualified workers and saw the labor shortage as their most pressing problem. A decade later, employers face the same issues. But a decade of innovation and advancement in work/life initiatives is helping Utah employers to start to solve those problems.

The majority of new entrants into the Utah labor force are young and a large proportion of them are women. Many of these are working parents balancing their responsibilities at home and at work, and striving to integrate work and life in a way that benefits their families and their employers. Competitive Utah employers recognize these social and economic challenges. In response, they have begun to consider greater flexibility in the workplace and an array of family friendly support programs. These programs help in hiring and retaining a committed workforce and in meeting companies' goals for productivity and profitability.

Many Utah companies already provide programs or policies that are characterized as family-friendly. Building on this foundation and the experience of companies nationwide, Utah employers of every size have an opportunity to build their companies while supporting families across the state.

Over the past several years, a number of studies have measured the impact of work/life policies on business. Early research focused on measurable outcomes such as turnover and absenteeism rates. More recent studies illuminate less quantifiable outcomes such as employee commitment, their involvement with change efforts, and the impact on employee's stress levels and health. The following examples describe the range of programs and some positive effects for both the employee and their families and for the company's bottom line.

**Child and Dependent Care Programs:** According to the Conference Board, a nationally recognized business information service, it costs U. S. industry billions of dollars each year for employee absences related to child care problems. Most companies surveyed by the Conference Board have indicated that the cost of work/life support programs are well worth the investment.

**Flexible Work Arrangements:** The Families and Work Institute conducts research on business, government and community efforts to help workers balance their jobs and family responsibilities. The Institute has found that workers with more flexible time and leave options and dependent care benefits are more loyal to their employers and more committed to helping their employers succeed.

**Parental Leave:** A study of parental leave policy at AT&T found that the cost of parental leave was 32% of an employee's annual salary versus 75% to 150% of salary in replacement costs. Most leave takers returned after 18 weeks of leave.

We learn from these studies and others that family-friendly benefits tailored to the specific location, company resources and employee needs of each business are most effective. In some cases, low cost policy changes are all that is needed. In other cases, the company should review company objectives and employee needs before developing policies or programs that address its specific business issues. In the following sections, you will find information on the range of family friendly programs, the planning process, and resources available to help your company move forward.

In Utah and elsewhere, successful companies have begun to rethink the way they do business.

## Understanding the Options

There are a number of family-friendly program options for large and small businesses. Some cost very little while others require a significant financial investment. Some can be implemented quickly; others will involve detailed planning and a commitment of time and company resources. Some programs will address the needs of the younger workers and their families; others may be most helpful to more senior employees. Most important, any progress in supporting employees' work and family balance will be appreciated by your workforce, and can make a measurable difference in the quality and productivity of your business.

As you begin to consider family-friendly strategies for your organization, it is helpful to understand the range of policies and programs described in this resource.

Remember that any program can be tailored to the specific needs of your business and your employees. No single program will be able to help every employee, but a careful planning process will ensure that whatever programs are implemented will help a significant portion of your workforce.

## What are the Options?

The programs and policies implemented should reflect the unique needs and concerns in your company. The following descriptions of the program options may be helpful as background for your planning:

### Flexible Work Arrangements

<b><i>Compressed Work Week:</i></b>	Employees work a full time schedule in fewer than 5 days.
<b><i>Flextime:</i></b>	Employees schedule their work with flexible hours but generally work some specified core hours.
<b><i>Part-time Work:</i></b>	Employees have a permanent reduced work schedule or temporarily work part time as they return after parenting leave.
<b><i>Job Sharing:</i></b>	Two employees share the responsibilities of one full time job with salary and benefits pro-rated.
<b><i>Telecommuting:</i></b>	Employees work from home or another location by linking to the office by computer and telephone.
<b><i>Flexplace:</i></b>	Employees working at home or at another location. Flexplace does not necessarily include computer link to office.
<b><i>Dependent Care Leave:</i></b>	The employer gives time off for care of a newborn or adopted child or for a sick family member. The Family Medical Leave Act and state regulations must be considered by companies with more than 50 employees.

***Sick Leave for Family Illness:***

Employers allow the use of an employee's own paid sick leave to care for family members as well.

***Personal Leave:***

Paid days off are given for personal business which can not be scheduled on other days off such as funerals, minor surgery, school conferences or other matters.

***Sabbatical:***

After a certain length of service, some companies offer employees paid leave to work on a specific project which may or may not be job related.

## **Information and Education Services**

***Child or Elder Care Resource and Referral:***

The company contracts with a resource and referral agency that provides specific information on service providers as well as consumer education and support.

***Employee Assistance Plan (EAP):***

The employer provides confidential help, information or referral for employees whose personal issues affect their job performance such as drug or alcohol abuse, emotional issues or pressing family concerns.

***Resource Library:***

A lending library of resources including books, tapes and videos that address family, parenting, health and wellness issues.

***Work/life Newsletter:***

The company publishes (or subscribes to) a newsletter that contains information on family and health issues.

***Lunchtime Seminars:***

Programs are offered on family and health issues during a lunch hour. These can be a single event or a series of workshops and can also be held after work.

***Employee Support Groups:***

Workplace support groups are organized and facilitated for employees sharing similar concerns such as parenting issues, care of older relatives, substance abuse or other topics.

***Lactation Room:***

A private room is set up to accommodate nursing mothers who have returned to work but need to express milk during the workday to maintain lactation.

***Beepers for  
Expectant Fathers:***

Companies with employees who are not accessible by telephone have begun to provide beepers to expectant fathers during the last trimester of their wife's pregnancy. This allows for peace of mind should the woman go into labor and need to contact her husband.

## **Dependent Care Financial Assistance**

***Dependent Care  
Assistance Plan  
(DCAP Section  
125 Plan):***

Employers offer an IRS-approved plan whereby employees can set aside up to \$5,000 in pre-tax dollars for dependent care expenses. These are sometimes called salary re-direction plans or flexible spending accounts.

***Child Care  
Tuition Assistance:***

Employers offer workers a child care tuition assistance plan to help pay for parent's choice of child care.

***Vouchers:***

Employers arrange directly with child care providers or a service to pay a portion of the employee's child care expenses.

***Discount at Local  
Child Care Centers:***

Fees are reduced for parent-employees by arrangement with the employer.

***Dependent Care  
Reimbursement:***

The employer reimburses employee for extra expenses for child or elder care due to overtime work or overnight travel.

***Dependent Care  
Tax Credit:***

This is a federal tax credit for working parents who pay for child care for children under the age of 13. Many parents are not aware of the credit, and employers can do them a service by reminding them about the credit at the same time W-2 forms are mailed each year.

***Earned Income  
Tax Credit:***

This is a federal tax credit for lower income working parents. It is an income support program and parents do not have to pay for child care in order to claim the credit. Employers can remind eligible employees about the credit, which can be claimed once a year or as an advance payment that is included in take-home wages.

## **Child Care Services**

### ***On or Near Site Child Care Center:***

Employees' children are cared for in a center in or near their place of work. There are a few intergenerational day care models in the country that care for elderly relatives as well as children.

### ***Family Child Care:***

This is care for small groups of mixed age children in a private home with usually one caregiver. Employers can support the development of family child care homes through training subsidies or grants, by recruiting and training providers, or by contracting for services with an existing family child care system or association.

### ***Emergency: Back-up Care***

The company provides alternative child care for employees whose usual child caregivers are temporarily unavailable. Collaborations with other companies on a shared program for emergency back-up care is a popular option.

### ***Get Well Care for Mildly Ill Children:***

The company offers alternative care either in a special facility or in the employee's home for children who cannot attend their usual care because of illness, yet are not so ill that they require their parents' care.

### ***Holiday and Vacation Child Care:***

Many companies offer care during one week school vacations at or near the work site. Eight or ten week summer programs can be offered at another location.

### ***Before and After School Programs:***

Increasingly employers have begun to stimulate development of programs to make the school day match the hours needed by working parents. Programs may be offered at local schools, in community centers or at other locations. The role played by employers is typically start-up funding or on-going operating support.

### ***Reserved Slot in Child Care Center:***

The company reserves a certain number slots for their employees' children in an existing child care program.

## **Collaborative Work/life Programs**

- Collaboratives:*** The employer works with neighboring companies to organize programs for the mutual benefit of their employees. A collaborative allows for sharing the risks and benefits of a work/life initiative.
- Community Partnership Initiatives:*** The company pools resources with other businesses and community agencies to address common concerns of work, family and community life. Benefits of these programs are not limited to employees of participating organizations, but instead are offered to the whole community.
- Community Service:*** The employer encourages employees to participate in community service by giving time off or participating in charitable fund raising drives, blood donations, food drives, etc.
- Corporate Funding:*** The business contributes funds to expand the supply of child or elder care in the community.
- School or Community Organization Adoption:*** The company adopts a local school, day care center or family serving agency to support financially, materially or with employee volunteers.

In addition to the brief definitions included in this section, the Office of Child Care has more detailed information on the most popular programs. These technical assistance papers include descriptions and implementation issues related to:

- 1) Flexible Work Arrangements,
- 2) Information and Education Services
- 3) Dependent Care Financial Assistance
- 4) On or Near Site Child Care
- 5) Family Child Care
- 6) School Age Child Care
- 7) Short Term Child Care: Emergency Back-up Programs, Get Well Child Care, and Summer and Vacation Care
- 8) Creating a Collaborative Work/life Program

*(The aforementioned papers are also available online at [jobs.utah.gov](http://jobs.utah.gov).)*

## **The Planning Process**

The planning process for developing work/life support programs in your company will be similar to the process used in planning any new business venture. Careful planning will ensure that the policies or programs developed are consistent with company goals and responsive to employee needs. The success of the planning process is based on the following factors:

1. Acquiring a thorough understanding of the issues affecting your workforce;
2. Building involvement and support at all levels of the company;
3. Ensuring on-going communication on the process with decision-makers in the company;
4. Developing a long range plan that includes opportunities to pilot the proposed program(s), assess results and make modifications.

Begin by assessing the company's readiness to expand or implement work/life policies for employees. This requires collection of accurate, up-to-date data and candid, honest feedback from employees at all levels of the company. A complete picture of the company helps build a strong foundation for planning new programs or policies.

### **Step One: Preliminary Inquiry**

Company decision-makers or the committee designated to determine the feasibility of new work/life support initiatives need information on the level of interest in these issues within the company. In addition, they should identify possible leaders for the planning process, and should assess the likelihood that new policies or programs will be given serious consideration by decision-makers.

Typically, companies find that interest in work/life issues arises at various levels in the company:

- Employees who need help balancing family needs with work responsibilities,
- Managers who want to address absenteeism, retention, recruitment, or other business issues,
- Executive leadership interested in maintaining a competitive edge.

Determine who might spearhead this new venture and the level of company-wide support for family-friendly policies or programs.



- Identify an appropriate group of people to serve as the advisory committee for the project. Representatives from all levels of the company should be included: administration, management, and employees at other levels. In addition, an experienced work/life consultant may be helpful in guiding the planning process and planning for implementation.
- Identify the project chairperson.
- Identify support from managers in those company departments that would administer the proposed programs.

Develop realistic expectations for the planning process, by considering the following questions:

- How receptive will employees and management be to undertaking a needs assessment?
- What is an appropriate time line?
- What financial resources are available for this project?
- Is outside expertise needed?

### **Step Two: Assessment**

If the preliminary inquiry indicates some potential for successful implementation or expansion of work/life policies, move on to the assessment phase. An outside consultant may be helpful in developing an appropriate method for assessing company objectives, employee needs, and the resources available in the community. If a survey seems too formal or time-consuming, consider using focus groups or ask for informal feedback from managers, supervisors or the human resource department.

### **Review Current Programs and Policies**

Establish the baseline for your planning by reviewing information about the current work/life programs available in the company. Gather the following information from appropriate departments in your company:

- The existence of any work/life policies, including flexible work arrangements, and other programs
- Amount of management support
- Number of employees currently benefiting from these policies
- Which employee groups use these programs: managers, line staff, executives, support personnel, others
- Cost analysis of current programs
- Internal communications process for informing employees about existing programs
- Training available for managers in implementing existing programs

- Most recent evaluation of the impact of existing policies

### **Compile Company Data**

The company's interest in establishing effective work/life programs and policies is derived from its understanding that the workforce is changing and those changes have an impact at the workplace. Gather information on the following:

- What is the turnover rate?
- What is the absenteeism rate?
- What is the recruitment success?
- Are these statistics any different for employees with child care or elder care responsibilities?

### **Compile Employee Data**

It is important to collect the following information directly from the employees; assumptions made about employees' needs and preferences is rarely accurate and can lead the process astray.

What is the current profile of the employees?

- Age
- Income level
- Marital status
- Number and ages of children of employees
- Number of employees planning to have or adopt children within two years
- Number of employees caring for older relatives

What do the employees know about current work/life programs and how do they feel about their experience with the company?

- What programs do they know about?
- What programs do they use?
- How did they find out about those programs?
- Do they know how to use the programs?
- Do they think their managers or supervisors support usage of these programs?
- Are there any barriers to using the current programs?
- What would be most helpful to employees in balancing work and family?

### **Step Three: Analysis**

With information compiled from company records and employee survey or focus group responses, the advisory committee can review and interpret the available data. The overall goal will be to compare the effectiveness of current programs and policies with employee needs and company objectives.

#### **Review current programs and policies**

- Which programs work well and make a difference for employees?
- How much do they cost and are they cost-effective?
- Do they make a difference in the company's goals of reducing absenteeism or turnover and increased recruitment?
- What other programs or policies might be most beneficial to the employees?
- What are top priorities for program implementation or expansion?
- What person or department should oversee a pilot project?

### **The Pilot Project**

The work/life assessment process will usually indicate one or more programs to consider implementing on a trial basis. To gain maximum benefit from the trial period, establish an oversight committee to work closely with managers of the pilot project. During the trial period, the oversight committee will want to track the following:

1. Costs and benefits of the pilot(s):
  - What are the costs?
  - What benefits and barriers are identified?
  - Which pilot is most cost effective and valued by employees while meeting the company goals?
2. Make the pilot a manageable project and develop a plan that includes:
  - Measurable goals and objectives
  - A timeline and budget
  - A company-wide communication process
  - A baseline for measuring success
3. Implement the pilot project for six to twelve months
4. Monitor use and evaluate project effectiveness:
  - How many employees use the program?

- What do users and non-users like or dislike about the program?
  - Do all employees know about the program?
  - How did they find out about the program?
  - Do all employees feel free to use the program?
  - How does management evaluate the program?
  - Do employees feel supported by management as a result of the program?
  - What are the costs of the pilot program?
  - Are the costs of the pilot program realistic if implemented permanently?
  - How could the program be improved?
5. Communicate the evaluation results:
- Use several means of communication: newsletters, meetings, bulletin boards, e-mail or memos to ensure broad dissemination
  - Request feedback from employees
  - Determine plan of action for future programs.

## **Resources**

To begin your planning process or if you want additional information contact the Office of Work & Family Life at (801) 526-4340, or visit us online at [jobs.utah.gov](http://jobs.utah.gov). The Office can provide a list of consultants, information on child care licensing requirements, contact information for the child care resource and referral agency serving your area, and good advice based on the experience of other family-friendly Utah companies.